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## Character Development of Students through Integrated Religious Learning at Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang

**Besse Mutmainnah<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia

**Ummul Wafiyah<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia

**Muarifah Rahmi<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia

**Herianti<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia

**Sri Wahyuni<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: [besseinnah4@gmail.com](mailto:besseinnah4@gmail.com)*

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### ABSTRACT

This community service program focuses on strengthening the character development of students (*santri*) through integrated religious learning at Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang, South Sulawesi. The primary objective is to enhance the implementation of character education integrated with Islamic religious teachings, combining traditional pesantren values with contemporary educational approaches. The program involved collaborative activities including teacher training, curriculum development workshops, and mentoring sessions designed to optimize character-building processes. Results demonstrate significant improvements in students' religious understanding, moral behavior, and social attitudes. The integrated learning model successfully bridges traditional Islamic education with modern character development frameworks, creating a holistic educational environment. This initiative contributes to strengthening the pesantren's role as an institution for comprehensive character

formation, producing graduates who possess both strong religious foundations and excellent moral character suitable for contemporary societal challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

Character education has become an increasingly critical concern in contemporary Indonesian education, particularly in addressing moral degradation among young people. According to Muslich (2011), character education represents a comprehensive effort to instill positive values and ethics in students, enabling them to develop into individuals with strong moral foundations and social responsibility. The urgency of character education stems from various social phenomena indicating declining moral values among younger generations, including disrespect toward elders, academic dishonesty, and involvement in negative behaviors. These conditions necessitate intensive interventions through educational institutions capable of systematically and holistically cultivating character development.

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have historically served as primary institutions for character formation in Indonesian Muslim communities. Dhofier (2015) emphasizes that *pesantren* possess unique characteristics in shaping student character through total immersion in Islamic values and traditions, combining religious knowledge transmission with practical character modeling. The *pesantren* education system integrates academic learning with daily religious practices, creating an environment conducive to comprehensive character development. This traditional strength positions *pesantren* as ideal settings for implementing integrated character education programs that respond to contemporary challenges while maintaining authentic Islamic values.

*Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang*, established in 1930, represents one of the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institutions in South Sulawesi. According to Mattulada (1982), *Pesantren As'adiyah* has significantly contributed to Islamic intellectual development and character formation in Eastern Indonesia, producing numerous religious scholars and community leaders. The institution's long history reflects its commitment to maintaining traditional Islamic educational values while adapting to modern educational developments. This dual character makes *As'adiyah* an appropriate location for developing integrated religious learning models that balance tradition with innovation in character education.

The concept of integrated religious learning refers to educational approaches that systematically combine religious knowledge instruction with character value internalization. Muhaimin (2012) argues that integrated religious learning transcends mere knowledge transfer, emphasizing the transformation of religious teachings into concrete behaviors and attitudes in students' daily lives. This approach requires careful curriculum design, appropriate teaching methodologies, and supportive learning environments that facilitate value internalization.

Integration involves connecting religious subjects with other disciplines, linking classroom learning with real-life applications, and harmonizing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions in the educational process.

Current challenges in pesantren education include balancing traditional values with modern educational demands, enhancing teaching methodologies, and ensuring educational relevance to contemporary societal needs. Mastuhu (2018) observes that many pesantren face difficulties in innovating their educational systems while maintaining their distinctive religious character. Teachers often lack training in contemporary pedagogical approaches, curricula may not adequately address current student needs, and learning facilities sometimes remain limited. These challenges necessitate systematic interventions through community service programs that strengthen institutional capacity while respecting pesantren traditions and autonomy.

This community service program aims to address these challenges by developing and implementing an integrated religious learning model specifically designed for character development at Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang. The program focuses on enhancing teacher competencies, enriching curriculum content, and creating supportive learning environments for character formation. Through collaborative approaches involving pesantren administrators, teachers, and students, this initiative seeks to optimize the pesantren's potential as a center for comprehensive character education. The ultimate goal is establishing a sustainable model replicable in other pesantren contexts, contributing to broader efforts in strengthening character education throughout Indonesian Islamic educational institutions.

## **METHOD**

This community service program employed a participatory action approach, emphasizing active collaboration between university teams and pesantren stakeholders in identifying problems, designing interventions, and implementing solutions. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), participatory action research enables communities to become active agents in solving their own problems through cyclical processes of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach ensures program relevance to actual pesantren needs while building local capacity for sustainable change. The participatory process involved extensive consultations with pesantren leadership, teachers, and student representatives to ensure program alignment with institutional values and priorities.

Program implementation occurred over six months, from March through August 2024, involving multiple interconnected activities. The initial phase consisted of comprehensive needs assessment through focus group discussions with teachers, observations of teaching-learning processes, and document analysis of existing curricula. Based on assessment findings, the team collaboratively designed intervention strategies with pesantren stakeholders. According to Sudjana (2004), effective community service requires thorough situational analysis to ensure

interventions address actual community needs rather than imposed external agendas. The design phase produced detailed action plans including training modules, curriculum development guidelines, and monitoring-evaluation frameworks.

Implementation activities included intensive training workshops for 35 teachers on integrated religious learning methodologies, covering topics such as character-based lesson planning, active learning strategies, and authentic assessment techniques. Zubaedi (2011) emphasizes that teacher competency development constitutes a critical factor in successful character education implementation, as teachers serve as primary role models and facilitators in value internalization processes. The program also facilitated curriculum enrichment workshops where teachers collaboratively developed learning materials explicitly integrating character values with religious content. According to Asmani (2011), curriculum serves as the primary vehicle for systematic character education, requiring careful design to ensure effective value transmission. Additionally, the team established mentoring systems where experienced teachers guide colleagues in implementing new approaches, creating communities of practice for continuous professional development. Monitoring and evaluation occurred throughout implementation, involving regular meetings with teachers, classroom observations, and student feedback sessions. Sukmadinata (2013) argues that continuous monitoring enables timely program adjustments, ensuring interventions remain responsive to emerging needs and challenges. Data collection utilized qualitative methods including interviews, observations, and document analysis, with findings analyzed thematically to identify patterns and insights regarding program effectiveness and areas requiring further development.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The community service program yielded significant outcomes across multiple dimensions of character education at Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang. Implementation of integrated religious learning approaches demonstrated positive impacts on teaching quality, curriculum relevance, and student character development. The following sections present detailed analysis of three key result areas: teacher competency enhancement, curriculum integration achievements, and student character transformation outcomes.

### **Enhancement of Teacher Competencies in Character-Based Instruction**

Teacher competency development constituted a primary focus of the program, recognizing educators' central role in character formation processes. Training workshops successfully enhanced teachers' understanding of character education principles and their ability to design character-integrated learning experiences. Participants reported increased confidence in explicitly addressing character values within religious instruction, moving beyond implicit modeling toward systematic value cultivation. According to Muslich (2011), effective character education requires

teachers to intentionally plan learning experiences that engage students in active value exploration and internalization rather than passive reception of moral instruction.

The program introduced teachers to diverse active learning methodologies particularly suited to character development, including case-based discussions, role-playing scenarios, project-based learning, and reflective journaling. These approaches encourage students to actively grapple with moral dilemmas, apply religious principles to real situations, and critically reflect on their own character development. Teachers particularly appreciated practical demonstrations and opportunities to practice new techniques in supportive workshop environments. Mulyasa (2011) emphasizes that experiential learning significantly enhances teacher professional development, enabling educators to internalize new approaches through direct practice rather than abstract theoretical instruction alone.

Post-training classroom observations revealed notable improvements in teaching quality, with teachers demonstrating more varied instructional strategies, increased student engagement, and more explicit attention to character dimensions in religious content. Teachers began regularly incorporating character reflection activities, using religious stories as springboards for moral reasoning discussions, and creating learning tasks requiring students to demonstrate character values in action. These pedagogical shifts align with recommendations from Lickona (2012), who argues that effective character education engages students' heads, hearts, and hands through integrated cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning experiences.

Sustainability mechanisms established through the mentoring system proved particularly valuable, creating ongoing support structures beyond formal workshop sessions. Senior teachers reported professional satisfaction in guiding colleagues, while mentees valued having accessible resources for problem-solving and encouragement. This peer support network addresses common challenges in educational innovations where initial enthusiasm wanes without continued reinforcement. According to Fullan (2007), sustainable educational change requires building professional learning communities where teachers collaboratively develop expertise through ongoing interaction, shared problem-solving, and mutual accountability for continuous improvement in instructional practice.

### **Curriculum Integration: Bridging Religious Knowledge and Character Values**

Curriculum development workshops successfully produced enriched learning materials that explicitly integrate character values with Islamic religious content across multiple subject areas (Santalia et al., 2025) and (Muhsyanur, 2024). Teachers collaboratively developed lesson plans that clearly identify target character values, design learning activities facilitating value internalization, and include assessment strategies measuring both knowledge acquisition and character development. This systematic integration ensures character education becomes central rather than peripheral to religious instruction. Muhaimin (2012) argues that effective integration requires reconceptualizing religious education's fundamental purpose from mere

knowledge transmission toward comprehensive character transformation rooted in Islamic values and principles.

The integrated curriculum emphasizes connecting abstract religious principles with concrete character applications in students' daily lives. For example, lessons on Islamic teachings about honesty now include activities where students analyze real ethical dilemmas, discuss appropriate responses based on religious principles, and commit to practicing honesty in specific situations. Similarly, instruction on compassion incorporates service projects where students actively demonstrate care for others, reflecting on how their actions embody Islamic values. This approach addresses common criticism that traditional religious education remains too theoretical, failing to translate knowledge into practical character expression. As noted by Nata (2012), meaningful religious education must bridge the knowing-doing gap through experiential learning opportunities enabling students to practice religious values in authentic contexts.

Curriculum materials now incorporate diverse instructional resources including contemporary case studies, multimedia content, and community-based learning activities that connect pesantren education with broader social realities. Teachers developed modules addressing character challenges particularly relevant to adolescents, such as digital ethics, peer pressure resistance, and developing healthy identity formation rooted in Islamic values. This contemporary relevance increases student engagement and demonstrates Islam's ongoing applicability to modern life challenges. Tafsir (2008) emphasizes that Islamic education must continuously reinterpret traditional teachings for contemporary contexts, helping students understand timeless principles' relevance to their actual lived experiences and moral challenges.

Assessment strategies evolved to include both cognitive measures of religious knowledge and authentic assessments of character development through behavioral observations, self-reflections, and peer evaluations. Teachers reported that these diverse assessment approaches provide richer understanding of student growth beyond traditional examination scores. Character report cards now include specific feedback on values like responsibility, respect, integrity, and compassion, with concrete examples of demonstrated behaviors. This comprehensive assessment aligns with Berkowitz and Bier (2005), who argue that character education evaluation must extend beyond knowledge testing to include authentic evidence of values internalization manifested through consistent behavioral patterns across diverse situations over time.

The activity depicted shows a religious learning session held in the mosque of an Islamic boarding school, where female students (*santriwati*) gather with their instructor for collective study and guidance. The session reflects the strong tradition of Islamic education in the pesantren, emphasizing the transmission of religious knowledge, moral values, and discipline through direct interaction between the teacher and students. In a calm and respectful atmosphere, the *santriwati* attentively listen, take notes, and engage in the learning process, highlighting the role of the

mosque as a central space for spiritual development, character building, and the strengthening of Islamic scholarship within the pesantren community.



**Figure 1.** The study process at the Mosque, Sengkang



**Figure 2.** The devotion of the female students in a multicultural manner

### **Transformation of Student Character and Religious Practice**

Student outcomes demonstrated meaningful improvements in both religious understanding and character expression, indicating successful integration of knowledge and values. Students exhibited enhanced ability to articulate connections between Islamic teachings and character virtues, moving beyond rote memorization toward deeper comprehension of religious principles' moral implications. Focus group discussions revealed students' growing capacity for moral reasoning grounded in Islamic frameworks, analyzing situations from multiple perspectives while consistently referring to religious values as decision-making guides. This cognitive development reflects Kohlberg's moral development theory as adapted for Islamic contexts by Mujib (2006), emphasizing progression from external rule compliance toward internalized principled reasoning.

Behavioral observations and teacher reports indicated increased demonstration of target character values in daily pesantren life. Students showed improvements in punctuality, responsibility for assigned duties, respectful communication with peers and teachers, and voluntary assistance to others. Dormitory supervisors noted enhanced cleanliness and order in student living spaces, reflecting growing responsibility and discipline. These behavioral changes suggest values internalization is occurring, with students independently choosing character-consistent actions even in unmonitored situations. As emphasized by Berkowitz (2011), authentic character development manifests through autonomous moral behavior driven by internal commitment to values rather than merely external compliance seeking rewards or avoiding punishment.

Student self-reflections revealed growing awareness of their own character development needs and active engagement in personal growth efforts. Many students began maintaining reflective journals documenting their character challenges and successes, setting personal improvement goals, and seeking guidance from teachers or peers when facing moral dilemmas. This metacognitive awareness and self-directed development indicates students are becoming active agents in their own character formation rather than passive recipients of moral instruction. Lapsley and Narvaez (2006) argue that mature moral character involves developing moral identity where ethical values become central to self-concept, motivating consistent alignment of behavior with internalized principles across diverse life situations.

The program's impact extended beyond individual character development to influence pesantren community culture. Students initiated several character-focused activities including peer mentoring programs where senior students guide juniors, community service projects addressing local needs, and student-led discussions on applying Islamic ethics to contemporary issues. These collective initiatives demonstrate character education's social dimension, developing not only individual virtue but also commitment to community welfare and social responsibility. This aligns with Islamic educational philosophy as articulated by Al-Attas (1980), which emphasizes developing both individual righteousness and social consciousness,

recognizing that complete human development requires cultivating both personal moral excellence and active contribution to community flourishing.

## CONCLUSION

This community service program successfully demonstrated that integrated religious learning approaches significantly enhance character development outcomes at Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang. Through systematic teacher training, collaborative curriculum development, and supportive mentoring systems, the program strengthened the pesantren's capacity to fulfill its traditional mission of character formation while addressing contemporary educational challenges. Key achievements include enhanced teacher competencies in character-based instruction, development of curriculum materials that explicitly integrate religious content with character values, and observable improvements in student character understanding and behavioral expression. The program's participatory approach ensured interventions aligned with pesantren values and needs while building local capacity for sustainable continuation. Established mentoring networks, enriched curriculum resources, and enhanced teacher competencies provide foundations for ongoing character education excellence. This initiative affirms pesantren's continuing relevance as vital institutions for comprehensive character development, capable of producing graduates who embody both strong religious foundations and excellent moral character. The integrated learning model developed through this program offers replicable frameworks for other pesantren seeking to optimize their character education functions, contributing to broader efforts in strengthening moral development throughout Indonesian Islamic educational institutions.

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